

DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Friday, May 26, 2000

From My Perspective

By Ken Patterson

Hi, DCFS staff everywhere! Lately, I've noticed that the rumor mill has been unusually active. Our official newsletter, [The Link](#), is too infrequent to cover fast-breaking news. So we're going to try a weekly e-mail message. This week's message will discuss the status of the budget, adoption subsidies, the status of SAFE, and policy updates. There is also a section on practice tips. For future weekly updates, please send your comments or responses to Caren Frost by e-mail or call her at (801) 538-9856.

Budget Status

By Ken Patterson

The budgetary forecast for the period ending April 30, 2000 shows that we are projecting to be \$4.2 million in the red for fiscal year 2000. Actually, this is good news, because in October 1999 we were projecting almost a \$10 million shortfall. The bargain with Robin Arnold-Williams, our Executive Director, has always been that if the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) could get down to a \$4 million shortage then the Department of Human Services (DHS) would help with the balance this year. So your efforts to work within our existing budget have been successful! Since we still have May and June 2000 to make further improvements, we may actually come closer to balancing than we thought possible. Thank you!

Each region and the State Office have their budgets for fiscal year 2001, which begins on July 1, 2000. Each Region Director has negotiated a staff cap, i.e., the number of people who can be hired. **The "hiring freeze" that has been in place since late November 1999 will be lifted effective Monday, June 26, 2000.** Any region that is under its staff cap is free to fill positions on that date. My last check showed Cottonwood, Eastern, Salt Lake, and Southwest Regions below their cap, with Granite and Western Regions right at their cap, and Northern Region still a little over its cap.

Interesting to Note

If we compare the third week of November 1999 with the third week of May 2000, DCFS had 2.3% more days of out-of-home care paid. However, the cost per day for all children in care has dropped from an average of \$49 per day to \$39 per day. In November 1999, one in four children in DCFS custody were placed in a "D code" placement. Today, that number is now one in five. Thank you for your thoughtful planning with kids and their families. Keep that momentum going!

State Office Changes

On a personnel note, 11 additional positions in the State Office will be transferred to DCFS regional operations or other positions within DHS between now and July 2000. Interviews with all affected State Office staff are about halfway done. A list of who's going where, as well as a list of program contact persons in the State Office will be provided for you in this weekly missive in June 2000.

Adoption Subsidies

By Ken Patterson

There has been considerable media attention about the funding for adoption subsidies lately. Here are some data facts for you to put the media information into perspective. In 1995, DCFS was making a subsidy payment to 500 adoptive families. Today, those adoptive families number over 1,700. Additionally, each family receives a medical card to pay for physical, dental, and mental health treatment for adopted children. The average subsidy payment statewide is \$305 per month.

About 175 families receive a “special needs” adoption assistance payment, which averages about \$750 per child per month. Almost all of the “special needs” funds pay for special therapies that adoptive parents feel are unavailable from mental health centers or they are used to reimburse adoptive parents for the cost of residential treatment.

It should be noted that the use of “special needs” funds has been unequal around the state. Thus a financial goal for DCFS has been to provide fairer access to “emergency” supports for all adoptive parents. We have several situations where more than \$150,000 was spent on individual children, which illustrates to me that DCFS has not been unresponsive to specific children’s needs. The large majority of adoptive parents are happy with the adoption subsidy program; however, those who have experienced cuts or are frustrated with the type and/or the level of service they receive from mental health agencies are understandably upset.

Finally, when the legislature failed to fund Governor Leavitt’s recommended increase for the DCFS Adoption Subsidy Program, we had to begin reducing the money spent in order to make this program financially solvent. Currently, our strategy is to encourage adoptive parents to use medical cards to pay for their chosen treatments and to have mental health centers be more flexible around the services they deliver. We will use any resulting savings to fund basic subsidies for new adoptions.

For your information, the DCFS Board will hold a public hearing on adoption on June 22, 2000 in Salt Lake City. If you are in Salt Lake City, you are most welcome to attend this public hearing.

Update on Policy Changes

By Steven Bradford

I am looking forward to using this forum to keep you informed of the actions of the DCFS Board, any new legislation, and input received from other groups that relate to policy and/or rules. In my weekly updates, I will provide you with a brief description of activities relating to these actions. Below, I have listed some of the policies currently in progress.

- I sent the new rules for selecting foster and adoptive parents by email to you on May 1, 2000. The rules are now waiting to be published for public comment.
- A new rule governing adoption subsidies has been drafted by the Adoption Steering Committee. The DCFS Board will consider this rule on June 22, 2000.

- Extensive revisions to Out-of-Home Policy have been drafted and will be published with the next quarterly update, which will be released at the end of June 2000.
- Child Protective Services (CPS) Policy has been completely rewritten and is being prepared for presentation to the DCFS Board. This presentation will take place in July 2000.
- A revision of the hearing rights in the "Foster Parents Due Process" Rule has been approved by the DCFS Board and will be published for public comment in June 2000.

SAFE Update

By Robert Lewis

SAFE 2.206 was released to the field on May 8, 2000. The "2.206" means this is the sixth "point" release version since 2.2 came out in November 1999. As you know, the SAFE team has made point releases every six to eight weeks since November. This update is to let you know that the SAFE team will be lengthening the time between releases to more efficiently use the resources we have to program, test, and train everyone on how to use SAFE. The longer time frames between releases should lessen the impact of changes for SAFE users in the field.

Of all the SAFE releases since the beginning in December 1996, release 2.2 undoubtedly required the most adjustments for field SAFE users. However, we all seem to have weathered the hardships that are common for the early months of a new system release, and have reached a new stage of comfort in SAFE use. We are very grateful for the support and patience of everyone during this period. With release 2.206, we were pleased to add some conveniences for users. One example is the ability to switch case types back and forth between Protective Services Counseling (PSC) to Protective Services Supervision (PSS), without altering case plans and action items.

Currently, release 2.207 is planned for deployment in late July 2000. This version will be piloted in three regions and we are preparing the SAFE support for these efforts. Field users should see major improvements in the "person health" component, which supports work with foster children by our health care team. Another major development for this release is the addition of a "Family Assessment Service" case type. As you will have heard, family assessment is a new service activity relating to House Bill 259 that provides an alternative way for DCFS to respond to certain kinds of child maltreatment referrals. Other SAFE changes that will be ready for release in July include being able to

- Print the "traveling packet" with a single command,
- Delete your own draft documents,
- Access an improved PACMIS eligibility interface,
- Give field users more control over which persons are listed and printed,

- Phase out temporary versions of documents, and
- Make changes to the Independent Living plans.

In addition, improvements to service plans and progress summaries will also be available with this next release of SAFE.

Release 2.206 included 107 fixes that had been identified through calls you made to the SAFE Help Desk. We need SAFE users to continue to call the Help Desk to report system problems and/or make suggestions. These calls are crucial if we are to have a system that really serves the needs of DCFS field staff and the programs in which we are involved. The SAFE Help Desk phone number is (801) 538-4044.

Read This, Then Listen

By Richard Anderson

As we focus our attention on the basic skills of our practice, there may be a tendency to believe that we, as individuals, have already arrived. We are always just beginning. The basic skills need to be relearned and practiced regularly. The skill of listening effectively seems to be the skill most prone to being taken for granted—thinking that it is alive and well, when it is not. Here are some helpful thoughts from Mortimer J. Adler's book, How to Speak; How to Listen.

Everyone, when they are young, has a little bit of genius; that is, they really do listen. They can listen and talk at the same time. Then they grow a little older and many of them get tired and listen less and less. But some, a very few, continue to listen. And finally they get very old and they do not listen anymore. That is very sad; let us not talk about it. (Gertrude Stein, as reported by Thornton Wilder)

The ears have nothing comparable to eyelids, but they can be as effectively sealed as eyelids can be closed. Sometimes both close at the same time, but it is often the case that the ear is turned off while the eyes are open. That matters little if, in either case, the mind's attention is turned to other matters than what is being heard or seen. What the senses register are then sounds and sights that lack significance.

The most prevalent mistake that people make about both listening and reading is to regard them as passively receiving rather than as actively participating. They do not make this mistake about writing and speaking. They recognize that writing and speaking are activities that involve expenditures of energy, unflagging attention, and the effort to reach out to the minds of others by written or oral communication. They also realize that some persons are more skilled in these activities than others and that increased skill in their performance can be acquired by attention to rules of art and by putting the rules into practice so that skilled performance becomes habitual.

Sometimes people have been known to use education, credentials, or position as a substitute for real skill. Professions that base their work on gathering vital information from others through effective listening cannot afford to get rusty on that skill. Let's take every opportunity to be reminded, be open, or learn something new about how to effectively listen—and then practice, practice, and practice!